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TO A

F R I E N D,

CONCERNING THE

SCHOOL at ACKWORTH,

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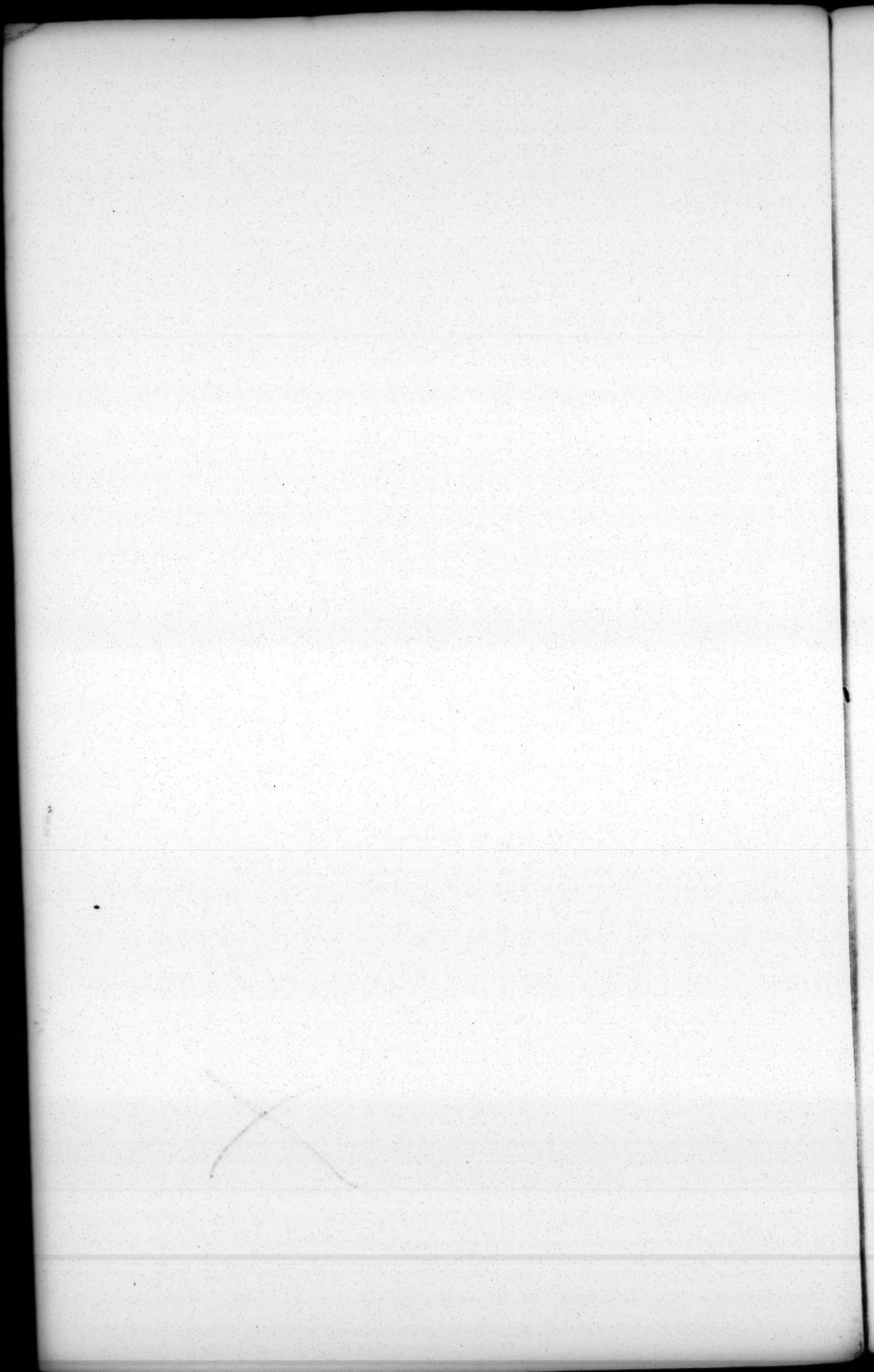
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M. DCC. LXXXII.



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L E T T E R

TO A

F R I E N D, &c.

DEAR FRIEND,

FROM the moment of my having perused, in a pamphlet written by the late benevolent and learned doctor Fothergill, an account of the institution at Ackworth, I felt a desire to visit this monument of well directed charity, which even those, who are not members of our society, have mentioned with applause. Some few months have elapsed since I embraced the opportunity of *yielding* to this desire. Not to observe that I had *gratified*

it were an injustice to my feelings. Unavoidable avocations withdrew me from the spot, after continuing there only two days ; a short period for my inquiries concerning an establishment which may, without presumption, be styled acceptable to the **GREAT SOURCE** of bounty, because it is an earthly blessing for a portion of his creatures.

If I had viewed a place where the young mind was to be trained to knowledge and to virtue, without a variety of profitable reflections, I should have blushed afterwards at so culpable an indifference. It was on this occasion that the sentiments which I submit to thy perusal came crowding in upon me, the faster, perhaps, because I was, in some respects, a stranger to the measures hitherto pursued, and to the opinions of friends in general, relative to this interesting and pious plan. The time was too short for *particular* information ; and not *thoroughly* obtaining it, I felt myself reduced to the necessity of supplying the want of it by *observation*

observation and conjectures. These, accompanied with the narrative of what I *really* did discover, will form the subject of my present letter.

The worthy Treasurer (whose judgment, perseverance, and activity, discover, whilst they reflect a lustre on his character, and spread many advantages about the place, that the efforts of the human mind may rise superior to increasing years) answered my inquiries, in a manner so obliging, that it were unjust to conceal, on this occasion, my grateful recollection of the pleasure which I felt, during an interview that left me nothing to regret, except the shortness of its continuance. Nor is it less a debt to all the persons who fill, under the committee, the several departments of this institution, to declare, that from an assiduous attention to their duty, an order so happily arranged and admirably conducted has arisen, that those who have observed it, believe that the Divine Hand is stretched over this founda-

tion for immediate good, and for the production of blessings which shall descend on ages yet to come.

Even in the first stages of this establishment, children were brought, in such numbers, that masters (of which the properly qualified appeared difficult to be found) were wanting to conduct their education. At this crisis, several friends, anxious to prove of service to the society, to strengthen and advance the cause of truth, and to transmit an useful lesson to posterity, stepped forward, and, with disinterested zeal, devoted no inconsiderable portion of their time in bestowing instruction upon the first young scholars who were received at Ackworth. The emulation to do good, was diffusively extended; more tutors presented themselves as successors to the former; yet even these were few, comparatively with the increasing number of their pupils. The generosity of friends in different counties had given such real vi-

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gour and success to the proceedings of the committee, as to enable them to provide for their maintenance and instruction.

At this period, about one hundred and ninety boys, and one hundred and twenty girls are at Ackworth, reaping, under the eye of their preceptors, the advantages of a judicious education. Not included in this number are more than sixty children, who, on the expiration of the time allotted for their continuance at the school, returned to their parents; thus making room for others, permitted to supply their places. The virtuous readers, who can survey with pleasure the thriving progress of unfullied charity, will feel a satisfaction at being told that the terms on which these children, sent (except the few brought out of Scotland) from most parts of England, were admitted on this establishment, proved adequate to the discharge of

of board and clothing. But in the same spirit of charity, they will lament that resources are still wanting; and, if they are blessed with affluence, they will consider themselves as the stewards of heaven, and devote a proportional part of their pecuniary enjoyments, that these resources, wanted for the support of the foundation, may be obtained.

It may not be improper to remark, that the salaries of the officers and servants, the repaire of the premises, and the charges for the conveyance of the children, *must* be paid. But *mere* payment to officers and servants, whose labours are singularly assiduous, is not sufficient. All indefatigable and useful zeal is well intitled to reward. To the exertion of this disposition the school may stand indebted for a multitude of advantages. Yet even more would issue from the introduction (were it possible to accomplish such a point) of an augmented number of school-masters.

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I am led to form the most sanguine expectations from the minute of the last yearly meeting, in which annual subscriptions were recommended to the monthly and quarterly meetings. I give full credit to our friends for the benevolent effusions of their hearts ; and I wait, with all the confidence of hope, to hear that supplies, adequate to every occasion, have been raised by means the least burthensome to the contributors. The success, which has accompanied the sincere endeavours taken to educate the youth at Ackworth, is a persuasive call to charity. I more than flatter myself it will be heard ; and that the liberal subscriptions of our friends will afford convincing proofs that, in supporting this institution, we are influenced by one congenial spirit.

When I reflect, that if a multitude of children had not received a shelter, from vice and wretchedness, in the seminary at Ackworth, the great duty enjoined to us from above, of sowing in the minds of youth

youth the uncorrupted seeds of true religion and of useful learning, would not have been duly regarded ; when I contemplate the declining condition of society, which has, with too much justice, been ascribed to a connivance at the departure of our youth from that ingenuous and unaffected simplicity of manners which, under Providence, was as a wall of defence, when we became a people ; and whilst I still perceive cause to apprehend, that if the rising generation be not *effectually* instructed to observe “ the day of “ small things,” consequences severely detrimental to the sacred interests of that truth which we profess, may rapidly strike root ; I look with joy upon that pious institution, of which the doors stand open for the admission of uncultivated youth ; and where improved in the points of serviceable knowledge, and (what exceeds that knowledge) the rectitude of the heart, they may congratulate themselves on their escape from those impressions which have led others to an indulgence

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in reproachful liberties, and on acquirements which may hereafter place them companions in the path of modest worth, and probity and peace amongst the honourable and beneficent members of society at large. It is greatly to be wished, that friends were unanimous in their opinion concerning the utility of this school ; that they were sensible of the quick proficiency in exercises of several of the children during a comparatively short time of trial ; and that they saw the awkward pupils in the art of writing, of the preceding year, emerged from incapacity, and teaching penmanship to their companions. A prospect of this affecting nature, heightened by the grave and decent conduct of the scholars, by the wise and gentle, yet restrictive modes of treating them, and by the harmony and order that surround them, would act with irresistible but sweet compulsion, and make the rich, and those who are removed from poverty, bestow their bounty, and rejoice to gain, as valuable interest for their donations, the consciousness of

of having fulfilled a necessary and important duty.

It is rumoured, that some friends have repressed their inclinations to contribute munificently to the maintenance of this school, from an imaginary fear that on the arrival of a future period, it would be rendered *free*. If the conclusion which we must draw from hence is, that *too many* advantages can descend to posterity, such an idea may excite a smile, but to convince us that it is well founded is beyond its power.

The maxim that every age should make provision for its own poor is, in the abstract, too just to be refuted. But, examined under particular points of view, it will give way to the opinion, that every age is not *equally* inclined to grant a maintenance to its poor; that the wealth of nations, like the property of individuals, is fluctuating and uncertain; that many may hereafter be circumscribed in the exertion

tion of the power, which they now possess, of doing good with a distinguished liberality; and that even the descendants of some, who now withhold their contributions, may have occasion to lament that their ancestors, resisting the pure spirit of diffusive charity, had not considered the school at Ackworth as the object of their beneficence. Whatever circumstances may arise, it is not unnatural to imagine, that when this very school shall have been established on so broad and flourishing a basis, as to preclude the usual necessity of support, by subscriptions, opportunities of doing good will present themselves in all ages, and in all countries, to the benevolent and well-disposed. Wherefore should we wait until the morrow, retaining, within our hands, that which, if advanced to-day, in pious hope that Providence would shed blessings on the gift, might lead, almost within the moment, to great and durable advantage? Early and bountiful subscriptions would produce the happiest of consequences. This seminary, suffi-  
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ently capacious to receive ~~five~~ hundred children more might *then* be filled; as, even now near fifty are on the list, and waiting for the next convenient admission. The augmentation of subscriptions would give rise to ample and effectual provisions for the many children of indigent parents, whose want is cheerfully, but with difficulty, relieved by the small meetings of which they are members.

At the commencement of this institution, several friends were apprehensive that it would prove more than difficult to maintain a strict decorum in the words and actions of the scholars. That amongst three hundred children, some, previous to their admission, may have contracted disgraceful habits, which only seasonable checks, and frequent admonitions, with the Divine assistance, could eradicate, appears a truth too evident to be disputed. Yet it may safely be affirmed that, in the school at Ackworth, so powerful is the prevalence of good example, and such the weight

weight of the instructions of that love, which neither wounds nor spares, that whatever is unbecoming, either in word or deed, has rarely been perceived amongst them. The reader will wonder the less at this assertion, when he considers the means adopted to prevent these puerile irregularities. Twelve monitors, endued with talents superior to those possessed by the generality of their companions, and retaining that pre-eminence, which is the just result of an invariable steadiness and decorum, are appointed to assist in the schools, to keep a strict eye upon the conduct of the rest, and to insert the names of the offenders in a book, expressly set apart for that purpose. The second day of the week is appointed for their trials, at which the Treasurer and the Masters preside, and, according to the nature of the delinquency, either admonish by strict advice, or proceed to censure, or give orders for correction. This book, the serviceable but alarming record of the transgressions of the children, is open to the committee.

mittee. The former, aware of this circumstance, preserve a guard upon their words, and, from *a dread of shame*, are cautious not to merit reprobation from numbers of respectable and discerning friends. But there is still a nobler passion which, I should hope, must influence their conduct; gratitude for tender care, for serviceable instructions, and for many great advantages poured on them by the properly directed hand of beneficence. Animated with a lively sense of benefits received, they will call up, through the permission of the Divine grace, the virtuous resolution of avoiding, by every means within their power, all causes of offence. Yet not alone to this discipline is the school at Ackworth materially indebted for a variety of advantages resulting from the well-tempered order that prevails on all occasions, and in all departments. Important services accompany that wholesome rule of habituating the children to the maintenance of a silent attention. Silence has been called the nurse of thoughts. But that

that abstract silence, which, as a people, we labour to obtain, partakes of a sublimer nature: it leads to an exalted cultivation of the mind, and renders it susceptible of impressions from the Divine Author of all good.

Another benefit arises in favour of the children who are admitted to the seminary at Ackworth, and we may trace it in their absolute exclusion, through the course of education, from the company of those who are professors of a different religion. Anxious that such a circumstance should totally prevail within my own school, I have hitherto given admittance to no children but those of friends. But, I am much mistaken if most other schools (Ackworth excepted) do not receive children of other religious communities; and hence originates (what cannot too strictly be avoided) a baneful intermixture of manners, that wears off the truly serviceable decorum resulting from *a guarded education*. This inconvenience, more alarming

than, at the first glance, it may possibly appear, might be remedied, if friends would more liberally encourage school-masters, several of whom are compelled, by the necessity of procuring subsistence for their families, to follow this inconvenient practice.

With whatever discontent some parents observe the minute by which the children are forbidden to accompany either them or their friends from the school at Ackworth, to inns and other places, I hope and trust that the committee will never be persuaded to give up so wise a regulation. Of what service could the indulgence prove either to the institution, to the parents, or to the children? Would not the absence of even a few hours from the necessary duties of their station, unhinge the infant mind, and draw it from the growing love of wholesome application? Would it not excite within the breast of other children a train of wishes which it would be wrong to gratify? Should they thus reason with themselves (and certainly they would

would) “One of my school-fellows was indulged the other day with leave of absence, and now my parents are come, why should I be deprived of the same pleasure?” discontent might too generally prevail in the school.—Should the rules be suffered gradually to relax, from the slightest turning of the stream of discipline, the banks of order might be broken down, and every cultivated spot swept off by the violence of the torrent. Let parents consider this. Let them consult their own hearts, and ask whether, when the children are assembled, on the first day of the week, after meeting, either to read the holy scriptures, or books published by members of our own society, or, perhaps, to receive some other well-adapted, virtuous instructions, they would approve of the absence of their children: an absence which might at once prevent them from gaining an increase of good impressions, and unhappily withdraw their attention from all those which they had hitherto received.

It is needless to remark, that this school was established *solely* for the children of friends not affluent in their circumstances. Others are accused of having seized the privileges to which they had no just title. Nor is the charge absolutely groundless. But this circumstance will avail little, whether it was meant to condemn the institution as prejudicial to other schools, or the committee who received the children, or the friends who sent them. The purchase-money was considerable; the expence of furniture rose high, and it was necessary to procure and retain servants to take care of the premises. At this period, the sum of eight guineas, delivered with every child, was materially an object. It contributed to the support of the institution. When the expenditure of *large* sums had taken place, and when numbers of children were yet wanting to give vigour and success to that plan of the foundation of which the leading object was to provide, on moderate terms, a decent board and proper clothing,

ing, motives of sound policy required at least the temporary admission of all who sought it. Too much cannot be advanced in praise of that judicious and successful deviation from a general rule, when friends sent children to stay during a few months, with the view of inducing those parents, for whose sake the school was instituted, to part from their offspring, and to suffer them to reap the benefits of an education suited to their approaching rank in life, and calculated to advance their present, and to secure their future welfare. Having once gained this laudable and useful point, several friends, more than easy in their circumstances, voluntarily took away their children ; and I know instances wherein the committees have insisted on the removal of others. It cannot be denied but that some children, on the competence of whose parents to supply their wants it is difficult to determine, are still resident in the school ; but the committee have instructed their agents to use the greatest circumspection previous to the

delivery of bills of admission ; and there is every reason to suppose, that the utmost care will be hereafter taken, that no detriment, in consequence of this institution, should reach to other schools.

If any friends (but charity bids us hope they are not to be found) are *actually* disposed to take ungenerous advantages of the beneficence of others, all attemps to palliate their conduct would not cover the transgression. With themselves it rests to listen to the criminating voice of conscience. *That* will tell them more forcibly than the admonition of their fellow creatures, how unjustly they counteract the original intention of the establishment ; how obdurately, in the moment that the children to be received are limited to a precise number, they push the poor and fatherless from the charitable gate of that assylum which is thrown open to comfort and instruct them ; and with what a perversion of the heart and understanding, they prevent,

prevent, in many places, industrious school-masters from gathering the honest fruits of an expensive, long and toilsome education.

If a plan, for raising, by subscription, a sum adequate to the expences of sending a certain number of boys of superior genius, to schools, that they may be instructed in the higher branches of learning, should be adopted, every reason for apprehending that the society might feel the want of able teachers, would lose its weight. This measure would be an earnest of advantages that far outstrip all common expectation. I once wished that a master might have been employed at Ackworth, endued with learning and with talents sufficient for the purpose of conducting pupils through the whole circle of useful literary knowledge; nor even now, although it may probably be insinuated, that such a plan might prove of detriment

ment to other schools, can I entirely relinquish the idea. Too long have we been used to hear, without the power of refuting it, the serious complaint that our society has not produced a number of accomplished scholars. We confess, and let us intermingle our acknowledgments with awful veneration of the divine source of righteousness and wisdom, of the **ONE ALONE**, who can inspire the mind of man to virtuous intelligence, and throw it into useful life and action ; we confess that we have received important obligations from the labours of Penn, Barclay, and others, whose spirited, yet cool and incontestible defence of our principles will be admired, whilst any reverence for truth and knowledge shall remain amongst us. These celebrated writers were surely well convinced of the advantages resulting from the strength of human learning, and of the power which it conferred upon its possessors : and there is no doubt but the first mentioned author derived considerable benefit therefrom, not only when he proceeded to the execution of the common duties,

ties, but when he devised the means of cultivating and improving every great concern of civil life. I am therefore anxious that one of the plans should instantly be carried into execution, in order not solely that Ackworth may grow flourishing under a proper number of able teachers, but that it may prove a nursery of good preceptors (the want of which our own society have too much reason to lament) ready in time, to be transplanted into other seminaries of useful learning. It were a waste of time to expatiate on the disadvantages which must accrue from employing, in the capacity of masters, persons who are not within the pale of our profession. Yet friends equal to the task are found with difficulty; and I have the testimony of experience to support me, when I declare that I inquired, in vain, throughout the course of several years, for one classically educated, and equal to the task of teaching in my school. I have *at last* succeeded. A young man is at my side who reaped the advantage of having engaged

eight months as a volunteer in the service of the establishment at Ackworth.

As I have now troubled thee with those sentiments which occurred to me on the spot, I must beg leave to trespass a little longer on thy patience, and to submit to thy opinion some loose hints intended for the improvement of the plan which the committees have adopted. On the integrity and benevolence with which they set forward for the purpose of obtaining the accomplishment of their views, it would prove difficult to bestow too large a portion of applause. Yet, as they are anxious that the whole system of their operations should move forward on the broad basis of general utility, as far as, in the nature of human occurrences, such circumstances are attainable, it is a tribute of respect to so commendable a disposition, to *endeavour* to assist it by the proposal of some regulations which, probably, are not totally undeserving of the title of improvements

ments. It may be asked whether that line of education which does not run beyond a proficiency in reading, writing, and common arithmetick, is not too bounded for the future prospects of many children now at Ackworth, whose occupations will demand the fuller sources of intelligence. Could the farmer, one of that order of men, from whom the nation in general are warranted to expect a series of agricultural improvement, do justice to their hopes, if all the powers of knowledge were circumscribed within the art of writing, and of keeping with a tolerable accuracy, his own accounts ? In vain then must we expect to find in him those abilities which should assist him to survey land with the best and most approved instruments constructed for the purpose ; to draw exact plans ; to enter upon any task which bears relation to levelling, and to the measurement of work performed either by artificers, or others ; to discover why the modern and improved instruments of tillage

lage are preferable to those of former times ; and, when possessed of this discovery, to rise superior to the narrow prejudices of his more uncultivated brethren, and quit the beaten path on which his ancestors invariably trod. I am prepared for the objection, that few lads trained up to execute the duties of a country life, could possibly acquire so complete a stock of knowledge as to enable them to go through, with credit and success, such various employments ; and I answer, that if the exertions of the mind remain unfettered by the tedious (and to them unserviceable) attempts to grow conversant in the dead languages,\* they may arrive, previous to the expiration of their fourteenth year, and under

\* Many fond and partial parents, anxious to throw the *fancied* or the actual talents of their children into a brilliant point of view, imagine that it may be reached by an acquaintance with the learned languages. It is needless to remark, that men of discernment have expatiated, with a successful strength of reasoning, upon the

under such a discipline as that prevalent in the establishment of Ackworth, at such

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the benefits which must result from a classical education; nor can it be denied that, where abilities exist to work upon, and leisure is not wanting, the well directed study of the Greek and Roman authors may enlarge the mind, give elegance to the taste, and (what is far beyond the glittering ornaments of learning) dispose the reader to such instructive conversation with the virtuous dead, as may direct him to a fixed contempt for novels and romances, which only serve to bring the passions up in arms, and range them under the standard of VICE.—It is however worthy of a serious investigation, whether those who discover no taste for ancient literature, *especially* the descendants of men confined to humble lines of life, and much deprived of opportunities to cultivate the study of the “*Belles Lettres*,” might not, with more advantage, apply their time to the acquisition of a proficiency in sciences, either adapted to their abilities, or immediately connected with the nature of their profession. To know mankind; to watch the various incidents of life; and meditating, from the experience of the past, upon the probable occurrences of the future, to persevere in what was truly good, and dread the repetition of what was criminal or even useless; to shun the foolish and the wicked; are lessons more important than all which could be gathered from the Greek and Roman writers; and easily might youth imbibe them, when proper modes of education should have imparted a facility to the

a proficiency in this science, as rarely is obtained in common schools.

For whatever stations they may hereafter be intended, it is requisite that *all* should learn the use of maps, at least sufficiently to know the geography of their own country, and that they do not live upon the continent. Proper maps have already been presented to the institution ; and let us hope, that from the hand of affluence, a pair of globes will shortly follow.

It is equally to be wished, that ingenious lads, designed for carpenters, joiners, and builders, might learn the first principles of practical geometry, and the manner of so laying down by the scale any given plan, that it may preserve a just proportion. On this occasion, their learn-

the exercise of their understanding, and habituated their disposition to the love and practice of those virtues which command respect, and are necessary to the attainment of *real* happiness.

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ing, proving the help-mate of ingenuity, would render them more *truly serviceable* workmen, and (not the burthens, but) the ornaments of the society.

The propriety of indulging lads, who have a turn for fine writing in the exercise of that beneficial art, cannot absolutely be controverted. It is certain, that as clerks, they would be deemed a valuable acquisition. But there are motives which must justify an unwillingness to recommend too close an application to this branch of learning. Multitudes aspire to such posts. The idea that they are genteel is filled with danger to the possessor, who frequently concluding that he must make (in the vulgar phrase) a figure, proceeds, with too worldly a rapidity, in the pursuit of affluence, and (I should fear, not seldom) becomes lost to society, and to himself. Farmers and mechanicks, with less temptation in their way, are more likely to become the more useful members of society.

I now take leave, with the remark, that the vacant hours of the lads may pro-

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perly be filled up, in the perusal of such books as may furnish them with some knowledge of a general system of nature, whether it refer to all the parts and properties of this habitable globe, or to those immensely distant and stupendous bodies which perform their revolutions with astonishing exactitude, and must, even if we reflect a moment, inspire the mind with awful thoughts of that **ALMIGHTY POWER** who formed the whole within the hollow of his hand.

If thou shouldst imagine that the foregoing hints can prove of any service, I am persuaded that thou wilt communicate them to the committees appointed for the management of the school at Ackworth.

Sincerely wishing the prosperity of the institution,

I am, &c.

JOHN LATIMER MORTON.

Wandsworth, 1<sup>st</sup>  
1<sup>st</sup> Month, 1782.

